Rangahau rangatiratanga: Writing as a Māori scholar

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Abstract

To arrive in Aotearoa, we traversed thousands of miles. Waka hourua were our papakāinga and te ra filled with wind to carry us. Finding our way, we drew on knowledge of oceans, skies and winds. Creatures of the sea and air showed us the way and signs and signals of this world and between and across worlds guided us. We made our homes in Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, making lives for ourselves, drawing on long held matauranga. Our science, our scholarship is embedded in te tai ao and the survival and wellbeing of our people. We continue to find our way, drawing on long held matauranga and adapting and developing new knowledge. In this article, I attempt to centre being māori, exploring what it is to work and write with colonisation at the margin, rather than the defining determinant of who we are and how we differ. I face the challenge of writing as a Māori scholar, to claim rangatiratanga in our practice and representations of these practices.

Keywords: Rangahau; Indigenous scholarship; Kaupapa Māori; Indigenous research; Indigenous knowledge systems; Matauranga

The call for this article by the guest editors of this special issue invited us to consider what 'social sciences in Aotearoa look like when we disrupt and decentre Pākehā understandings in a decentring that would enable recentring on the Pacific, the place of our collective inhabitation so that our thinking and research might become a unique expression of this place rather than a tired sociological form of Eurovision karaoke'. As a call for writing about what we do as Māori that is not adapted to, or centred in, western thinking and research, it was a familiar one. It aligns with our multiple writings and practices that challenge colonisation and endeavour to defend and assert the space and place for Kaupapa Māori theory and praxis; that is, research and theory grounded in Māori worldviews. Many of these writings begin with the

way colonisation has disrupted our trajectories and how, as Māori, we assert the right to our science and ways of being and working.

When writing of our philosophies and practices, we generally describe concepts that underlie our research and research practice, often with colonisation as a shadow. We are called on explicitly or implicitly to defend, resist and assert the validity of what we do. We struggle to describe our practice in English in ways that do not simply appear to be superficially culturally flavoured or else defensive, but that place te ao Māori (the Māori world) at the centre. We struggle to say what we do and how we do it, aware that we are describing 'different' ways of working to our audience, who are mostly non-Māori.

My initial approach to this article began in this way. However, the editorial call also aimed 'to open spaces for the imagination and description of forms and practices of knowledge production that need not explain themselves in the language of European social science'. Can we do this and more? If we were to imagine and describe forms and practices without needing to use the language of European social science, then could we do so in ways that centre our Māori scholarship and explored what our 'conventions' and ways of expression might be. In writing this article, I attempt to centre being Māori. I explore what it is to work and write with te ao Māori at the centre, rather than colonisation being the defining determinant of who we are and how we differ. This article is a journey that seeks to re-present some of our mahi (work) written from our scholarly, scientific, and research positions and traditions in order to claim rangatiratanga (authority, self-determination) in our practice and in our representation of these practices.

Here I attempt to not only centre our practice but to centre and explore ways of expressing this practice. It is a journey of imagining our scholarship and placing western academia and colonisation at the margin—both the notions of validity in social science and the accepted ways of expressing these. We acknowledge the profound effects of colonisation, but here I seek to push these aside as much as I am able, to leap into the abyss where creation and remembering guide us. We have been guided in this way before, navigating our way here to Aotearoa and making our lives here as Māori.

From an English law standpoint, I am answerable to my employer and situated within a western academic institution. However, while I have a duty of respectful relationships and accountabilities, these are not my primary considerations. I do not plan to be buried at the university and my primary accountability is reflected in an ongoing question: What can working out of a university bring in terms of service to a collective kaupapa or purpose? The pursuit of scholarship is not the issue. Once we were scientists and scholars and we still are.

In our mahi we argue that mātauranga Māori (Māori systems and bodies of knowledge) embraces science as a process of knowledge generation, continuing a long trajectory of scholarship within te ao Māori. I recall Sir Tipene O'Regan speaking of our long tradition of Māori scholarship, and, on another occasion, Dr Ranginui Walker once defended a question that I had asked, which was dismissed by someone present as being 'intellectual'. He asserted that, as Māori, we were intellectual and there was nothing wrong with this. Our kaumātua (mentor, guide, expert) Dame Rangimārie Naida Glavish is an extraordinary theorist. I honour and cherish the discussions I have had with her. I have also learnt from listening to Hinewirangi Kohu-Morgan speak and having conversations with her. There are many others whom I have been privileged to listen to, read their writings, and/or speak with, including Rangimārie Turuki Arikirangi Rose Pere, Sir Mason Durie, Ruakere Hond, Rangiānehu Mātāmua, Charlotte Mildon, Leonie Pihama and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. There are those whose writings have given me strength, knowledge and affirmation, including Ani Mikaere and Reverend Māori Marsden. And just as important are those I work with or have worked with in the past, whose incredible aroha (love, generosity, and compassion), determination and mātauranga are not seen by the academy: Wendy and Remana Henwood, Iri Morgan and Hine Tohu, to name but a few.

These are just a handful of our scholars, theorists and holders of mātauranga. In English terms, we might label one person a practitioner or community member, another a theorist, another a researcher and another an academic. However, as Māori we go beyond this; our knowledge is tied to action for collective purposes. In practice we move across and between and

through these categories. We learn from each other and take on various roles at various times as, ideally, we work as one for a common goal.

To arrive in Aotearoa, we traversed thousands of miles. Waka hourua (voyaging canoes) were our papakāinga (homes) and te rā (significant Māori sail) filled with wind to carry us. Finding our way, we drew on knowledge of oceans, skies and winds. Creatures of the sea and air showed us the way, and signs and signals of this world and between and across worlds guided us. We made our homes in Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean), making lives for ourselves, drawing on long-held mātauranga and adapting and developing new knowledge. We did not need to know who we were—we just were—we were māori (normal, ordinary). We traversed time and space. Our science, our scholarship, was, and is, embedded in te taiao (the natural world) and the survival and wellbeing of our people.

We continue to find our way, drawing on long-held mātauranga and adapting and developing new knowledge. We have the three kete (treasured baskets) of knowledge. There are variations to this knowledge narrative, but in one, Tāne-nui-a-Rangi (progenitor of people, forests, and creatures of the forests) ascended through the 12 realms, meeting challenges. When he reached the summit, he received the three baskets. On returning the knowledge to earth he faced multiple challenges, but the winds rescued him. The knowledge was planted in Papatūānuku (earth, earth mother) and Tāne became Tāne-te-Wānanga-a-Rangi (bringer of knowledge and higher consciousness), charged with maintaining order on earth. Te whatumanawa is our third eye and the seat of the soul; it is a place and space of dreaming and transformation, where matakite (a way of knowing and seeing) provides us with visions of the future and deep insights.

In writing this, I am trying to avoid saying what we are not, because this centres non-Māori ideas of what they (non-Māori) are and how we differ from them. However, I want to assert that we are *not* an oral culture; this is a category set up in contrast to cultures who see themselves as having a long-standing system of using particular visual marks to represent words. The marks I am using—writing, as we now think of it—came to our shores and were readily adopted as part of our system of knowledge transmission and

communication. We embraced this within our tradition of Māori scholarship and innovation. Our mātauranga is now, in part, transmitted in this way, as well as in myriad other forms, using multiple media and modes of transmission. Our knowledge narratives tell us about creation and our world, describing both the universe and local places and spaces, and transmitting mātauranga in vivid and remembered ways. These are not myths, legends or stories; they are our science and embed our rangahau (Maori research praxis), transmitting values, knowledge, warnings and guidance. Whakataukī (guiding sayings), for example, provide us with theoretical and practical guides, expressing values and concepts that echo throughout our repositories of mātauranga. Many of these describe our interconnections and relationships, our whakapapa (interwoven relationships, systems and genealogies), obligations, and roles in relation to all things; they also contain prophecies drawn from seeing and knowing. We do not need western science to prove the validity of what lies within and beneath.

Much of our mahi is grounded in te taiao, in the imperative to practise mutually respectful relationships with the whenua, but there is a ngārara (lizard like creature). It did not come from the heavens; it did not come from the underworld; it did not come from our world. It came from somewhere in between. Once, it could see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel, dream, remember and know. But it strayed too far from the whenua (land, placenta, place of nurture) and now it can only feel what it holds. It speaks but it cannot hear. Because it cannot see, it thinks everywhere is home. It turns around in the earth trying to make a soft space to rest, digging down to try to find food, eating the earth to try to fill its belly. But because it cannot find its home, it cannot rest, so it cannot dream. To know something is real it must hold it, but its claws are sharp and strong and much of what it holds is crushed.

It can be healed, but it fights those who would heal it. It cannot see, smell or hear them, and asks, “Are you real? If I cannot hold you in my claws, how do I know you are there?”

It can hear the voices of others of its kind who also strayed too far from home. They tell each other they are whole and that they do not need healing. The ones who want to heal the ngārara also listen to the voices of others and

the earth speaks to them. The earth tells them that the ngārara are causing too much pain, and if her warnings are not heeded, then both the ngārara and the people will be destroyed. She brings forth fire, wind and water to stop the pain and restore balance.

The ngārara cannot feel the fire, wind or water as they cannot hold it in their claws, but they feel the difference in the earth. They continue to turn around in the earth and try to fill their bellies, wanting the pain to stop but not knowing how. They say, "The earth is changing, we must make it stop." The ones who are trying to heal them explain that the ngārara are the ones who have changed; the earth is being the earth. They put scorched rocks in the claws of the ngārara, place their claws in the rips in the earth and in the thick, dirty swirling waters. The ngārara say, "There is something wrong, we all need to change our ways." They tell the people that they all need to stop turning on the earth and filling their bellies. The people know this. They had been trying to tell the ngārara for many generations, but the ngārara only believed in what they could touch with their claws. "Our knowledge is real," some of them said.

The people took the wisest and humblest of the ngārara to their homes, they placed their claws gently around the trees, they held their claws to their hearts, they worked alongside them to clean the forests, rivers, and lakes and slowly their eyes began to uncloud and they heard the people. "Now you must talk to the other ngārara. They cannot hear us, but they will speak to you, then they might listen, and we can work together."

To transform ourselves, we need to bring together all ways of seeing. This is a wake-up call where dreaming turns to action, underpinned by Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of seeing and working. But, just as the *doing* is the work of generations, so too is the *undoing*. No one and no thing is untouched, and neither the ngārara nor the people can simply turn around and be as they were.

We are guided by the past, present and future, with tikanga (guiding values and praxis) bringing us together in our work as tangata whenua (people of the land) and inviting others to join us. To speak more plainly, in our te taiao mahi, the hapū (sub-tribe) (or whānau [family] or iwi [tribe]) decides the

path and we walk alongside, each bringing our own tools to place in the kete. The tools can come from many worlds, but once they are placed in the kete they sit within the rangatiratanga and scholarship of the hapū. We must each learn our roles; when to step forward and when to step back. We must choose the right tool from the kete for the right purpose. The tools emerge in the hands of many and are transformed through this. We must reclaim our scholarship, our science and our mātauranga from past, present and future. Rangahau rangatiratanga binds us as we move across and between categories, weaving and growing the mātauranga needed to guide our journeys.

In writing this I have been thinking what you, the reader, will take from this. If I use more concrete language, will it make more or less of what I am trying to express? In other writings I describe our practice in more 'concrete' terms, conforming to style, formatting and referencing. If we centre our ways of being, how is this reflected in our ways of expression (albeit here the attempt is largely in English). Can we recognise this as scholarship and legitimise our ways of conveying meaning? How do we practise rangahau as an expression of who and where we are and reclaim and reassert our voyaging expertise across time and space?

We have not arrived; it is a journey.

References

He mihi nui ki ngā tangata, ngā kaumātua, ngā whānau, ngā hapū, ngā iwi, ngā tūpuna.

He mihi ki a Whāriki hoki

He mihi ki te ao ki te pō

Nāu te mātauranga.

Nō hea te mātauranga?

Kāore i ahu mai i te puna kotahi

Nō Te Toi-o-ngā-rangi, kei roto i a tātou

Nō te ao mārama, nō te pō

Kei roto i ngā kōrero

Mai i o tātou kuia, o tātou whānau, o tātou hapū, o tātou iwi

Kitea ai i o tātou moemoeā

Kia kōrerotia tō tātou tuakiri

He māori.

Where does knowledge come from?

No knowledge comes from one source.

It comes from the heavens; it comes from within us and from the universe.

It comes from light and dark.

It comes from the bedside stories our grandmothers told us.

It comes from wānanga, kaumātua, whānau, hapū, iwi.

It comes from dreaming, seeing, listening, and from knowing.

It comes from doing.

It comes from Google and from written scholarship . . .

. . . but written material is not paramount.

It is no more privileged than tauparapara or whakataukī . . .

. . . the myriad of ways we pass on scholarship and mātauranga

. . . the myriad of ways we tell our stories

. . . different stories co-existing

. . . speaking to who we are.

Helen Moewaka Barnes (Te Kapotai, Ngāpuhi) works extensively with whanau, hapu, iwi and other communities, supporting their aspirations across multiple domains of wellbeing and research. Helen's research areas currently include wairua, natural environments and health, life-course approaches to health and wellbeing, health promotion, health services research, haputanga, whanau ora, growing Māori and Pacific research capacity and research use; developing methods and methodologies within Māori paradigms and evaluation research. She is a Professor and Co-director of the SHORE & Whāriki Research Centre, College of Health, Massey University, New Zealand, Pou Patai with Ngā Pae o te Maramatanga, Māori Strategic Theme Leader for A Better Start National Science Challenge and Director, Health Research Council Programme, Tangata Whenua Tangata Ora: investigating health gain through whenua initiatives.

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The writing of this article was funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand, grant number 19/694.